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ABSTRACT

While Europe is experiencing new transnationalism based on technical economic links, European preschool education is not as accommodating to multicultural growth as economic growth has been. In many schools, children are forced to learn and interact in a language foreign to them. This break with their mother tongue is also a break with maternal ties, causing tension between home and school. Language learning and usage both reflects and affects social relationships. In the preschool setting, the child is apt to feel alienated and to experience intense pressure to lose ties to their mother tongue by rapidly learning the language of the school. In this context, the child experiences conflict in trying to integrate multiple identities into a unified form of written and oral expression. This experience is akin to the psychoanalytic notion of transference, where a child redirects desires formerly focused on parents to new groups. Preschool staff may underestimate the tensions involved in integrating children, and their parents, into a preschool setting. This underestimation can lead to misunderstanding and alienation of both parents and children. (JW)

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ED 388 448

A Common European Home: Pre-school Perspectives on European Identity

In almost every country in Europe, peaple from very different cultures are living together. In pre-school establishments in Germany, Britain, and France, one can find children from at least ten different cultures. Japanese, Chinese, Indians, Africans, South Americans - there is practically no national group that is not represented in Europe's everyday life.

Altough the way in which multi-culturality is tackled has developed differently in each of the European nation-states, the resultant situation is the same in almost every case: in all the European cultures, the 'foreigners' have to operate with the particular national culture and language; nowhere is there any attempt at establishing a multi-cultural society in which all cultures living within it are offered the same conditions (of life) - ranging from the 'official language' to equal cultural resources. The only exceptions are countries that have distinct official languages and differing cultures that have grown up together and are officially established by tradition (Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, etc.). Yet here too, it is clear that even a lengthy tradition of varying cultures within one nation does not necessarily produce mutual acceptance.

Multi-cultural co-existence has now moved far beyond these one-off examples, and ideas have now grown up achieving tolerance and integration on the basis of universal 'humanity', in measures ranging frim helping foreigners become assimilated to supporting them in preserving their own special cultural characteristics. However, many of these notions about its being possible to live in peace with people of every culture, and the notion that this in itself constitutes a multi-cultural society, have proved illusory. The desire to remain 'open' to all people which initially prompted many attempts at integrating foreign children and adults is increasingly being qualified along the lines of 'provided they can come to terms with our notions of what social life should be! You surely don't expect me to accept it when a Muslim mother won't let her daughter go with eth others to the swimming-pool'. This is the kind of 'good' pedagogical argument put forward, in this case, by a German nursery-school teacher.

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The notion of boundless scope, as previously offered to all (native and foreign) children and parents within pre-school education, is now in many cases being withdrawn because the hopes in regard to integration have not been realized: the foreigners have remained foreigners, and the Germans are distancing themselves more and more from them. A nursery school's 'reputation' has now come to depend directly on the percentage of foreign children attending it! The minimal acceptance which thus remains in regard to pedagogical attempts to achieve intercultural integration can quickly lead to harsh disappointment, or indeed bitterness.

One of the reasons the global integration of all the world's cultures under the single rubric 'human being' is such a difficult concept to realize (if it can be realized at all at present) is that the preconditions for the kind of pedagogical approach involved are mostly not present. These are:

- the ability to deal with differences in individual identity 'in one's own ranks' - either in the teaching-team or in the children's groups
- the ability to deal flexibly with institutional identity, and the ability to manage associated problems of co-operation and demarcation by reference to other, 'foreign' institutions on an national and, ultimately, also an international scale
- the ability to cope with the professional identities of collegues in neighbouring countries in Europe.

The treaty-based construct 'Europe' is far removed from attempts to achieve some kind of *rapprochement* between the various national conceptions of pre-school education: 'Europe' at present is merely an artificial notion held together by economic-cum-technical links between states. It is still a long way from the point which multi-cultural European co-existence ought by now to have reached. European integration is advancing only very slowly, and in many domains not at all. No one knows for sure what a multi-cultural Europe would be like - one whose citizens would feel 'European' whatever their culture of origin. And what would this mean for each of the national cultures involved? And, finally, what problems stand in the way of the development of a European identity?

Although the educational approaches that have been, and are being adopted, in the various European countries, appear conflicting, their treatment of foreigners is similar in at least one respect: all foreigners have to use the national language to communicate. The way in which the foreigner is related to is determined by reference to the domestic language - whether adaptation to the prevailing means of communication is required, or whether scope is allowed to the foreign languages

involved. The national language remains the main point of reference for foreigners in relating to the specific culture of a European country. This means that cultural conflict arises in, and in relation to, language, in those facets in which relational elements of a cultural kind are transmitted via language.

In order to assess the consequences of this for the development of cultural and national identity, I shall describe the basic features of speech-development with particular reference to its individual and social significance in interaction with foreignness. After that, I should like to pick out some scenes that occured during a research project involving pre-school teachers in a church-run and a local-authority-run playgroup, and which relate to identity problems in the multi-cultural context. In conclusion, I shall identify the experiences which I believe to be important for an extension of identity.

Language, Group, and Identity

When people talk of language development, they generally mean the acquisition of a mother tongue in its spoken and written form. This acquisition is strongly influenced by prior processes of development such as the nature of early bonding and care, motor development, and the degree of stimulation in the socializing environment. Speech, in the sense of the ability first to speak and later to write, thus expresses a person's ability to engage in relationships. The emergence of the cultural aspect of speech in the German-speaking world writing and reading are referred to as *Kulturtechniken* or 'cultural techniques' is thus preceded by the development of the communicative aspect, in the sense of the mother-child relationship.

Where conditions are unfavourable for children, the course of language development is different from that in situations where children are encouraged and valued as individuals, and are thus able to develop a feeling of self-worth. Language development thus goes hand in hand with relational development.

The possibility of rendering configurations of symbols in language, and the function of language as a means of communication in relationships in its unconscious as well as its conscious elements makes language one of the factors that promotes the release of the child from symbiosis with the mother and the assumption of a separate identity. This identity is acquired essentially through identification, through imitative speaking, but also through demarcation, through discovery of the personal ability

to articulate, and through speaking with persons other than the mother. In this connection, the first 'third person' is of particular importance, whether it be the father or some other third person, or whether it be an institution. It is in relation to the third person, the 'other', that the child first tries out its mother-tongue.

Every person distinct from the mother speaks a 'different' language; that is to say, the same words can have a quite different meaning-either motherly-cum-feminine, fatherly-cum-masculine, seductive, or threatening. We know know what communication problems exist between men and women, and how these can account for much of the tension between parents, and are probably responsible for many of the problems which a child experiences in forming its identity. The way in which the third person behaves towards the child has a positive or negative effect on the development of language as a medium through which foreignness may be overcome.

The difference in relational cultures, and therefore linguistically transmissible cultural differences and differing languages themselves, may be a result of what Erik H. Erikson describes as follows: 'Whereas it is quite clear was *must* happen for the child to stay alive (a minimum of food and stimulation) and what must not happen so that it is not physically damaged and chronically disturbed (exceeding a permissible level of early frustration), opinions differ as to what *ought to* happen, and the different cultures make wide use of their prerogative to decide what they consider right and necessary' (Erikson 1971: 64). In so far as cultural forms of relation correspond to differences of language, the latter also constitutes a part of cultural identity-that is to say, membership of a particular relational culture that is bound up with experience of the mother.

To the extent that language is conveyed through the mother, the cultural tendency to introduce speakers of other languages to one's own language, without considering that they are thereby forced to neglect or abandon what is maternal to them (i.e. their mother tongue), is revealed. Just as there is only one mother in a (European) family, it is apparently believed that there can only be one linguistic reference-point in any one given location. For example, acceptance of an outside child who speaks the same language as that spoken by the members of a community is not a problem if all those involved have the same matrinlear (i.e. mother-tongue) identity. It becomes difficult if it seems at first sight that the same language is being spoken but the mother tongues of the child and the group are different.

Transmission of language via several mothers, and indeed mothers from different cultures, is hard to square with most children's (family) experience that there can only be *one* mother in *one* family (by analogy the group; see Buchholz 1985). Behind group communication, a conflict can thus arise whereby the internalized mother-images threaten to exclude each other; and this in turn can lead to an acute split in the identity of the affected individual, and also in the group. This kind of split can often be observed in the case of children of divorced parents. Despite sharing a language, parents can misunderstand each other to such an extent that they part in a spirit of hatred. In most cases, the kind of split that is demanded of the child is such that the part that identifies with the mother excludes that which identifies with the father, and vice versa: when the child is with the father it is not allowed to talk positively about the mother; and when it is with the mother, it has to complain about the father. As a result, the part that is alien in each case becomes something from which one has to demarcate oneself negatively in communication.

In the multi-cultural context, the unavoidable requirement on foreigners that they learn the national language as a 'foreign language' thus has the effect of alienating them from their (maternal) culture. At the same time, it creates a special pressure to identify with that culture, because it demands a partial relinquishing of the person's own identity. Parents' organization of lessons in the national language for their children would seem to be an attempt to respond to this pressure and from the point of view of the parents to do something to counter maternal-cum-cultural alienation. It is clear from children of parents from differing (linguistic) cultures, that they have no trouble learning and using the parental languages provided the parents' relationship is sufficiently free of tension.

The mother's language as the language that develops out of symbiosis, and the father's as that spoken by the first 'foreign' person, constitute at once the familiar and the unfamiliar. But identification with both parents is an integral part of identity-formation in the case of all children, not just those who grow up bilingually. Even in the case of parents who speak the same language, their personal differences form one of the bases out of which childhood identity is developed. Becoming 'other' to a mother or father, or feeling oneself 'other' in relation to a parent not counting the 'otherness' of distinct gender signals the presence of emotions expressed through language, of openness or closedness towards those who are different, or towards others in general.

The experience of being a non-member of a culture produces a tendency towards alienation from the mother tongue and inevitably results in a split in identity in the outsider child. This is all the more pronounced the stronger the particular culture's requirements in regard to linguistic norms (consider multilingual as opposed to monolingual countries). The learning of language is thus not only a cognitive or technical matter; it touches at the very roots of identity formation. Individuals who grow up in these kinds of conditions easily become permanent 'commuters' between the two cultures, at home in neither.

Parents of first-generation immigrants represent (in relation, for example, to the demands of schools as the prime locations in which culture is conveyed through language) the pole that clings to the mother-tongue culture. Often their decision to live in a foreign country is itself determined by 'foreign' factors. In most cases, parents remain in the foreign country as a result of acculturation or of alienation *vis-à-vis* their own country. And yet they can neither stay nor go. What was originally maternal has itself become alien to them. This means that an ethnic group's social context is the most important medium for the stabilization of identity both in encouraging demarcatory identification *vis-à-vis* the home country and in relation to the shared 'third' element, namely life between the different worlds.

Barriers in the Head

As long as most staff in a pre-school educational establishment have the national language as their mother-tongue, the feeling of foreignness will remain one-sided: it is the 'foreign' children that can't be understood, and they are the ones that have to learn the language of the teaching staff. Given this precondition, one is then quite free to accommodate any independent cultural trait in the children (or their parents). What thereby goes unnoticed, however, is that the culturally distinct is obliged to employ a language that is foreign to it and, given the precondition of having to communicate in the dominant language, is robbed of its 'soul'. Anyone who has tried to translate poetry will understand this: many things just cannot be translated from one language into another because two languages, or, more precisely, two cultures, use different metaphors for describing relational configurations.

The respective national mother-tongues around which European pre-school education is focused only allow a glimpse of the fact that foreign children are sacrificing something. Children learn the 'third' entity so easily and quickly that one almost forgets the ties that bind them to the

'first' (that is to say, their maternal language/maternal culture). Fascination at children's ability to adapt to alien conditions is sometimes so great that one may come to view them as far more adaptable than their parents. This latter group -at least when they are first-generation settlers in the foreign country- are not 'movers between two worlds'. They mostly retain their original links with their 'fatherland' and mother-tongue. Thus, for example, a mother who has lived and worked in Germany for many years, would like her child, now 6 years old, to learn Chinese, so that it will be able to write to her in China, *when she is old*.

Oral and written language probably has a much greater significance than is generally supposed when measured in terms of 'technical' learning skills. It may itself be a metaphor for cultural and individual identity. Simple comprehension often masks this aspect. Because language is bound up with pre-linguistic emotions, it is the 'extension' of the germ of the individual in socially elaborated exchange. When 'words fail' a person, this indicates a rupture in social relations due to fear; and when a person 'talks like a book', this may be due to the same sort of thing. Both expressions indicate the importance of language as an expression of the person in the framework of interaction.

Change through Language

The (linguistic) interactions between staff in a pre-school educational establishment are -although it may not seem so at first sight- affected by the same problem of arranging several identities into a single team- or establishment-identity. The personal linguistic form in which individual (maternal and paternal) experience of life is contained has to find some compromise within work-related dialogue, and this compromise is that much easier depending on how identical the person's experiences of maternity and paternity have been. But professional communication is also overlaid with the collective attempt to rediscover the 'mother' in the person (usually the headmistress) who either lends themselves to such treatment formally, or else is particularly suited to it by character.

The psychoanalytic notion of transference aptly describes the mostly unconscious process whereby childhood desires formerly directed at parents are reactualized within the (team) group using the person of the headmistress as a focus. This model of coming together and gearing oneself to a maternal authority highlights particularly strongly the degree of attachment of the teachers to their own language and culture, despite a determination to remain open to *everything* foreign.

The 'trading-off' that goes on in regard to individual and group identity in relation to professional activity quickly shows up the limits of integration/of expansion into a multi-cultural *lebensraum*. In many cases, what is foreign is subsumed under what is one's own to as great an extent as is permitted by one's own experience. Thus, for example, in the eyes of the teachers, children of Italian origin, unlike Eritrean children, did not count as real foreigners; they were regarded as Germans by virtue of their everyday behaviour. None of the staff realized that the Italian children could quite well also have claimed cultural distinctness.

The possibility of feelings of alienness permeating 'one's own ranks' is demonstrated by what happened at a parents' evening held at Christmas. The teachers in the church-run group had taken a lot of trouble to prepare a quiet, reflective celebration, and during the evening they found themselves confronted with a group of German parents who, instead of singing Christmas carols, wanted to make a cosy pub-evening of it and enjoy a glass of beer together-a type of socializing which was in any case alien to the teachers. Clearly unable to transform their annoyance into some form of practical compromise, they went to great trouble to try and get a Thai father-who actually did not seem particularly lonely—involved in the proceedings by proffering all sorts of opportunities for communication. This too failed, because all this father did was talk to them. The whole team was evidently so narrowly geared to a specific notion of a 'parents' Christmas evening' that it proved impossible to 'integrate' either the German parents or the Thai father.

Being able to accept the differences that result from varying approaches to a social situation evidently has something to do with having a particular (maternal) plan worked out for the people in one's care. In the same team, for example, there was talk of a boy who consistently refused to eat as much as his teachers thought he should eat (a typical mother's problem). It may be that anxiety about welfare conceals anxiety about loss of control.

In the other, local-authority-run team of pre-school teachers there was a great disinclination to celebrate Christmas with the children, or with the parents, in a reflective way. The children themselves found a solution to the dilemma between the team's disinclination and the German parents' desire: their idea of a multi-cultural Christmas took the form of a Christmas tree in the nursery-school lobby which they were allowed to decorate exactly as they pleased, with no kind of aesthetic restriction. The result was that everyone who came into the school got a feeling of Christmas, and did so in a multi-cultural way, since the tree had not only

representations of German culture on it, but other, foreign images as well.

In terms of overall identity, this team, as compared with the church team, may be described as having a rather negative attitude towards early care, that attitude being legitimized by the children's 'independence'. In this team, people talked extensively about the problems it caused teachers when a child got too close to them.

The first meeting that took place between the two teams within the framework of the research project proved extremely fraught. The fact that they had two so very different—in fact, probably mutually exclusive—styles of motherliness towards the children led to mutual disparagement, up to and including harsh insults. After the church group had presented itself, the teachers from the local-authority-run group declared that they would *never* want to work in a church-run nursery-school.

A joint excursion to France, to visit various pre-school institutions, was planned as a way of putting the project into a European perspective. It was only the shared experience of foreign realms that made the teams more tolerant of, and willing to listen to, one another. The shared experience of understanding almost nothing, of being able to express one's view only with great difficulty, and of discovering only very little that was familiar in the foreign set-up, opened the participants' eyes to the narrowness of their own range of variations, and thus also opened up communications. One of the most interesting experiences for both teams was the impression of being happiest in a particularly difficult class in one *école maternelle*. Other classes, in which the encounter between children and adults was more harmonious, calm, and orderly, put the German teachers off: that kind of behaviour, they thought, could only have been achieved by exerting a great deal of pressure of a kind that would be totally rejected in Germany.

The teams' shared experience of finding a differentiating community of interests amidst the chaos (and one that devalorized the third party) was clearly more important to the teachers (and a stronger influence in establishing identity) than their desire to have harmony in their own schools or the possibility of discovering the path to it through the foreign example. But what at first appeared as a kind of 'closing of ranks' in the face of the unknown, and an attempt to work through their own cultural insecurity, increasingly became a source of irritation: How can you reject what you yourself would like to achieve? And how can you identify with something all too familiar to you as a failure on your own part?

Changes are probably wrought chiefly through irritating experiences, through crises and conflicts. Where as, for example, in a team one's own identity can serve collective harmony, even when this is only temporary and fragile, irritation can mark the start of a broader approach. In the case of the two teams, it led not only to an opening-up *vis-à-vis* what was Other or Foreign on a European scale, or to closer inspection of what the Otherness consisted in; it also led to the Otherness within the teams being taken more seriously, and being treated with more respect. In one of the teams, for example, it had not been properly realized up till then that one foreign colleague, who had been working there for years, was made to feel uncomfortable every day by the German mealtime etiquette: whereas in her own home, she said, people concentrated on eating during mealtimes, in the (German) nursery-school they were constantly talking. Until then, her German colleagues had countered with what they thought was the superior and, above all, 'educational' argument that mealtimes could be used for important and interesting discussions within the group. This team now deals differently with these kinds of cultural differences, and is more attentive to detail.

Conclusions

For members of the first generation of 'immigrants to Europe', there is no prospect, not even a distant one, of a 'common European home'. The path to it seems to me to be precluded simply on the grounds of national identity. The irritating experience of mealtime etiquette is probably a good metaphor for a possible route via personal experience: what should be in the forefront at the start of that route is not so much multi-cultural pedagogics but the sampling of foreign customs ideally in a foreign context and in real situations.

The teams involved in our research project are currently reflecting on whether, and how, they can expand their own experiences of foreignness, and those of their European colleagues. This demands a greater awareness of their own cultural identity, especially in those areas where, up to now, they have not felt that identity as part of their own personal make-up. In their professional dealings, pride of place is now accorded to respect for personal otherness, the attempt to arrive at institutional compromise, and the readiness to utilize irritations within the team in a positive way, instead of seeing them as deviations or disruptions that have to be eliminated as quickly as possible. It is not that there are now several 'mothers' in the schools; in fact, the teachers are making more effort to move away from the family model of education

and to establish a style appropriate to a social-cum-cultural mode of education.

One aspect of this is that greater account must be taken of the 'third party' in the (German) profession of 'educator' - a profession that is almost exclusively occupied by women. That 'third party' may take the form of men, of other institutions, or colleagues from other countries. With their help, an attempt could be made to find out how difficult it is to integrate the third party, the Other, as a coequal, and thus provide the children with a living example of multi-cultural integration. And they would be only too pleased to witness this, given that it would relieve them of the dilemma of opting for One against the Other.